Building Attachment in Families & Communities Affected by Transience & Residential Mobility: New Research Programme

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Abstract: People have traditionally moved from place to place in search of new employment opportunities. This has been a pathway for increased earnings, educational opportunities and standards of living. Some of New Zealand's critical infrastructural developments, industries and services have depended on a mobile labour force. However, transient families and high levels of residential mobility can also destabilise communities, reduce community attachment, and threaten the service infrastructure of communities. Transience can also contribute to poor social and economic outcomes for individuals and families. The paper sets out some of the key questions relating to residential mobility and transience and presents a programme of research[1] to address the issue of how to optimise the benefits of residential mobility for communities and families.

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Introduction

New Zealanders have high levels of residential mobility. Between 1986 and 1991, more than half the population aged 5 years or more moved at least once. A similar proportion moved between 1991 and 1996. Between 1996 and 2001, 49 percent of the population moved at least once. At the 2001 census, 23 percent of people had lived at their address less than a year. The most mobile are those in their twenties or thirties. In 2001 63 percent of adults 25-44 years had lived in their residence less than 5 years and 53 percent of children of 5-14 years had moved from house to house at least once in the previous five years. Various terms are used to describe those residential movements, including residential mobility, internal migration, and transience.

Some of those terms are strongly loaded with positive connotations – residential mobility is implicitly conflated with social mobility – or negative connotations – transience tends to be pejorative. There has, however, been little direct analysis into some of the key questions about residential mobility. Those are:
- What are the impacts of these levels of residential mobility on individuals, on families and on communities?
- And, if residential mobility has the potential for both benefits and negative impacts, how can those benefits be optimised while the potentially negative impacts are minimised?

In this paper we do not pretend to answer either of those questions. Instead we set out some of the key issues relating to residential mobility and present a programme of research designed with a nation-wide team of researchers to address the issue of how to optimise the benefits of residential mobility for communities and families.

A central part of that research programme is to clarify and categorise residential movements and the meanings communities, individuals and families bring to them. We are approaching that issue through an approach designed to uncover the meaning of movement for communities. In the course of some very preliminary work with communities, the research is already generating some new understandings of not only the nature and complexity of movement, but also some of the ways in which what appear to be relatively subtle changes in practice can have profound affects on the nature of movement for their communities. The paper closes, then, with some brief and preliminary commentary on those issues.

The Ambiguities of Residential Mobility

Residential mobility can be a pathway to opportunity for many individuals and families, and many local communities see inward migration as an important opportunity for population and local economic expansion as well as bringing capital and skills into a community. However, high levels of residential mobility and transience confront local communities with real problems of community attachment, and may be associated with poor outcomes for both highly mobile families and individuals and for all living in communities with mobile, unstable populations. For some communities, net-deficits of population may undermine the viability of local government. This research is designed to provide local communities and Government agencies with the tools to optimise community attachment and human capital development within the context of high residential mobility and transience.

Residential mobility can have real benefits for communities, individuals and families. Historically, people have moved from place to place in search of new employment opportunities. Residential mobility has been a pathway for increased earnings, educational opportunities and

standards of living. Some of New Zealand's critical infrastructural developments, industries and services depended on a mobile labour force. The mill and forestry towns of Kawerau and Tokoroa, the dam-building towns of Mangakino and Twizel are examples of essentially 'migrant' communities. Teaching, banking and medicine were all occupations associated with 'spending time' in small town, provincial New Zealand. The dairying industry also developed out of a residentially mobile workforce and mobile capital. As a consequence, for many years, high levels of residential mobility were accepted in public and policy debate as an indicator and a predicator of economic vibrancy and entrepreneurialism.

More recently, however, it has been acknowledged that high levels of residential mobility can have significant costs for local communities, individuals and families. Highly mobile families and individuals may find it difficult to access health and education services, find adequate housing and provide a stable labour resource to prospective employers. Families may be mobile not because they are attracted by opportunities elsewhere but because they are fleeing their current situation. Community and government agencies are concerned that where familial problems develop – such as child abuse and/or neglect – high levels of residential mobility make those problems difficult for community and government agencies to address. The Christchurch (CHCH) Child Development Study suggests that one of the strongest predictors of children at risk is residential mobility.

Certain localities may be exposed to the loss of high-resource individuals and families while experiencing in-migration of low resource individuals and families who, subsequently unable leave, become a highly deprived population within the area. Communities experiencing 'resource deficit' may experience further flight of resources out of the locality and be caught in a decline cycle and increasingly denuded of services and resources. Highly deprived neighbourhoods appear to have negative impacts on the individuals and families living within them, irrespective of the socio-economic status of those individuals and families. In contrast, vibrant, functional communities with strong public infrastructures can provide benefits to disadvantaged individuals and families that mitigate the effects of individual or familial disadvantage. In other words, the neighbourhood itself can act as an independent 'at-risk' or 'protective' factor for individuals and families. This is referred to as the 'neighbourhood effect' or 'contextual effect'.

High residential mobility may indicate a flexible labour market and contribute to efficient and profitable businesses and a thriving economy. But this is not always the case. Where transience is associated with poor educational outcomes and low labour market attachment, there must be a concern with the wastage of NZ's human capital. The development of a persistently unemployed, deskilled and dependent population, wherever that population resides, has been, and continues to be, of concern. Where local communities are unable to keep human resources, problems of labour under-supply can emerge and become a significant barrier to the sustainability of the local economy.

Informing the Policy Debate

Within policy circles there has been and remains a polarisation between:
▪ those who see residential mobility and transience as being a critical factor in the decline of local communities, leading to poor individual and family outcomes, and inhibiting the potential for economic innovation and expansion in certain localities, and
▪ those who see residential mobility as the pathway to familial improvement, the decline of local communities due to out-migration as an inevitable readjustment to changing economic circumstance, and residential mobility as a generator of economic efficiency and well-being.

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The reality is that we simply do not know the extent to which either of those positions are sound. There is a deep sense of confusion both at central government and within local communities. The Treasury's recently published working papers on the inclusive economy demonstrate the difficulties of developing coherent policy responses to regional disparities with an inadequate knowledge base.

The research base is deficient both conceptually and empirically. Some of the key deficiencies are:

- Residential mobility in relation to the dynamics of local communities has been neglected. Migration studies have focused on international migration and on rural-urban or urban-rural movements and some regional movements using aggregate statistics and official, quantitative data sets.
- The critical implications of the meanings, motivations and perceptions people bring to their own movements and/or to others moving in, out, or staying in, local communities, have been neglected.
- The unit of analysis has been the individual or the family. There has been little systematic analysis of how communities as collectivities respond to and interface with residential mobility.
- There is considerable ambiguity in much of the terminology used to describe residential mobility, transience and circulation and its potential impacts on individuals, families and communities. Concepts such as community attachment, social capital, and social exclusion need systematic, rigorous definition and measurement. The distinctions between different patterns of residential mobility such as transience need to be established through classification of different patterns or trajectories of residential movement. Measures of community well-being need to be systematised.

Until some of those deficiencies in the knowledge base are addressed, public and policy debate will continue to adopt untested assumptions about the dynamics of residential mobility, community attachment and residential mobility impacts on individuals, families and local communities.

Responding to Residential Mobility

One of the problems confronting policy makers concerned with social and economic development at the regional and local level is how to optimise the benefits for individuals, families and local communities of residential mobility while mitigating some of the adverse effects that can not only limit the life chances of individuals but also destabilise communities, reduce community attachment, and threaten the service infrastructure of communities. Destabilised communities with poor service infrastructures are likely to depress the local economy. To maximise the wealth generating capacity of communities, a better understanding of the dynamics between residential mobility, community attachment and the local economy is required.

Residential mobility presents New Zealand with one of those problems that has both cross-sectoral determinants and cross-sectoral implications. It raises profound issues fundamental to New Zealand's social and economic sustainability including the:

- factors affecting labour market flexibility
- relationship between frequent movement and community attachment
- implications of community attachment for the well-being of individuals and families staying as well as leaving and coming to the community
- whether some people or people at some life stages are more vulnerable or resilient to high levels of residential mobility

- extent that access to critical services (education, housing and health) is determined by levels of residential mobility
- extent to which the local community infrastructure is destabilised by rapid movements of families in or out the community
- implications for the economic and social sustainability of local communities of resource flows in and out of communities associated with residential mobility.

Understanding those dynamics are crucial to local and central government, business and non-governmental service organisations. For those who work with families in communities – whether it is in the health sector, the housing sector, the educational sector or the welfare sector – it is increasingly clear that knowledge about the extent to which residential mobility generates isolated families with a lack of stable networks, is crucial. Similarly, it is important for local and regional planning and service development purposes that community stakeholders understand how communities can contribute to strengthening familial reciprocity, respond to the needs of isolated families and re-integrate families within neighbourhoods and local communities.

For those concerned with New Zealand's development of our human capital and its productive engagement in business enterprise, residential mobility has implications for the development of an enterprise economy. One of the platforms of the enterprise economy is a flexible labour market. Labour market flexibility implies that not only will labour move to areas in which the demand for labour is unfulfilled, but that the unemployed will, if not prevented, move to areas of higher labour demand. There are, however a number of inhibitors to labour market flexibility – the prevailing configuration of the housing market in relation to tenure, house prices and affordability can impact on labour market flexibility. Less than perfect information around employment availability may interfere with residential mobility. In addition, neighbourhood effects may reduce the human capital potential of people who are 'left behind' in declining communities. Some labour markets have found themselves with a misalignment between the resident population and labour demand, or unable to attract appropriate skills to a community.

A number of industry sectors – including key export earning industries such as dairying, tourism, and forestry – have problems in keeping or attracting skilled labour to local communities. Critical local services can be at risk. Rural and provincial areas persistently face under-supply of doctors, teachers and veterinarians and these shortages may not only make communities less attractive to business and skilled labour, they may act to reduce the human capital in the local community through poor educational standards and health.

Critical Research Questions

Some critical questions need to be asked:
- What is the connection between community attachment, residential mobility and transience?
- What community and familial characteristics determine levels of residential mobility and transience?
- What impacts do high levels of residential mobility and transience have on the well-being of individuals and families?
- How do high levels of residential mobility and/or transience impact on the social and economic viability of local communities?
- What can community stakeholders do to build and sustain community and family wellbeing, and optimise attachment in communities with mobile populations?

A New Research Programme

The research programme has four inter-related objectives. They are to:

i.   Enhance the ability of local communities to plan for and manage the impacts of in- and out- residential shifts experienced by local communities by establishing the patterns of residential mobility and transience in local communities in relation to:
- the quantity and type of residential shifts;
- changes in the socio-demographic profile of local communities because of residential mobility;
- mapping residential movements in local communities against local labour markets;
- the array of wellbeing impacts with which residential mobility is associated

ii.   Enhance the ability of local communities to promote community attachment by establishing:
- measures and the determinants of community attachment, and
- the relationship between levels of residential mobility and levels of community attachment

iii.   Enhance the ability of local communities to ensure the resilience of local economies, service infrastructure and the well-being of local populations in the context of residential mobility, by:
- improving local stakeholders' understanding of the determinants and impacts of residential mobility
- identifying the risks and opportunities associated with residential mobility
- identifying the mechanisms, processes and relations required to build and sustain community and family wellbeing, optimise attachment in changing communities and address problems arising out of transience and residential mobility.

iv.   Enhance the ability of families and communities to improve the life chances of children and young people by increasing their understanding of the relationship between residential mobility and:
- children's cognitive development, and
- youth transition processes to adulthood.

The research takes both national and local perspectives through analysing national data and community data generated through four case studies in local communities – Kawerau, Opotiki, the Pacific peoples located in Waitangirua – Cannons Creek, and the South Island rural community of Amuri. All these communities have experienced considerable in- and out-migration over the last decade. All have particular concerns about the implications of the changing population on the economic and social viability of their communities. With the exception of Amuri, they are also communities which have high levels of disadvantage and, as such, raise very real opportunities to investigate issues around compositional effects relative to what is sometimes referred to as the 'neighbourhood effect' and sometimes referred to as the 'contextual effect' on outcomes.

All but Waitangirua – Cannons Creek are local communities in non-metropolitan settings. Despite the economic importance of the rural sector in New Zealand – both as the producer of our primary products and as the resource base which attracts tourists to New Zealand, research in non-metropolitan areas is limited in New Zealand. Three of the case communities allow us to consider some broader questions as to how individuals and families maintain livelihoods in non-metropolitan settings. Rural and semi-rural environments may present individuals and families with a much wider and varied scope for livelihood sustaining activities, perhaps over a longer span of the life cycle. If this is found to the case, this will provide a new base for thinking about

the relative costs and benefits of the metropolitan-centric settings that have dominated social and economic policy over the last three decades.

The research in the four local communities is focussed on:
i. *Critical Sectors:* Establishing how residential mobility impacts on and is determined by the dynamics in five critical sectors of social and economic life affecting individual, family, and community outcomes: the local economy and the local labour market; education services; health services; the housing market, and the operation of public safety through crime prevention and reduction.
ii. *Life Stages:* Two life stages critical to determining people's life chances over the long-term:
    ▪ children, with a particular focus on the impact of residential mobility on children's memory and their cognitive development, and
    ▪ young people with a particular focus on the impacts on residential mobility on the transition process from childhood to adulthood.

The research on critical sectors is divided into five modules:
▪ *Education Module*: This will establish whether high rates of student mobility have adverse impacts on student outcomes, whether patterns of residential mobility reflect the way in which schools operate within local communities, and the impact of high rates of student mobility on the operation and viability of educational institutions in local communities.
  Health Module: This will establish: the impact of residential mobility on the perceived health and well-being of members of local communities; the impact of residential mobility in local communities on the provision of primary care health services; the importance of health care provision and access on decisions to enter, stay or exit the local community. The module will focus on subjective understandings of health determinants, perceptions of the community and their own health outcomes, perceptions of the level and adequacy of care and its relationship to their past and possible future residential movement patterns.
▪ *Local Economy & Employment Module:* This will explore the dynamics of employment in the local communities by mapping the labour markets of the four local communities and placing them in a wider context of NZ's localised labour markets. It will establish: (a) how the demand for labour changes through the life and deaths of businesses in local communities; (b) the impact and role of foreign ownership and capital moving into and out of communities on local employment opportunities.
▪ *Housing Module:* This will determine the ability of local housing markets to meet the housing needs of individuals and families in the local communities; establish the extent to which the affordability and quality of housing impact upon residential mobility and the characteristics of those coming into, staying and leaving the local community; identify the impacts of changing residential mobility patterns and socio-demographic composition of the community on the demand for housing; establish the extent to which the housing stock is maintained and provides healthy living conditions for occupants; establish whether residential mobility patterns impact on the maintenance, integrity and value of the housing stock.
▪ *Community Safety:* This will establish whether and/or how residential mobility and transience: aggravate risks of offending; influence the nature and level of community security; have an impact on the incidence of offending and victimisation; relate to the functioning and effectiveness of community organisations in maintaining and reinforcing social norms, community identity and support for individuals and families at risk.

The research on life stages in the communities are also organised in modules:
▪ *Child Memory Module*: This will capture the cognitive development outcomes of residential mobility and transience with a focus on children's memory. The focus is on the emergence of children's autobiographical memory, self-concepts, and perceived identity within the

community and will establish the factors that contribute to positive cognitive development, self concepts, and self-esteem in the face of change brought about by residential mobility.
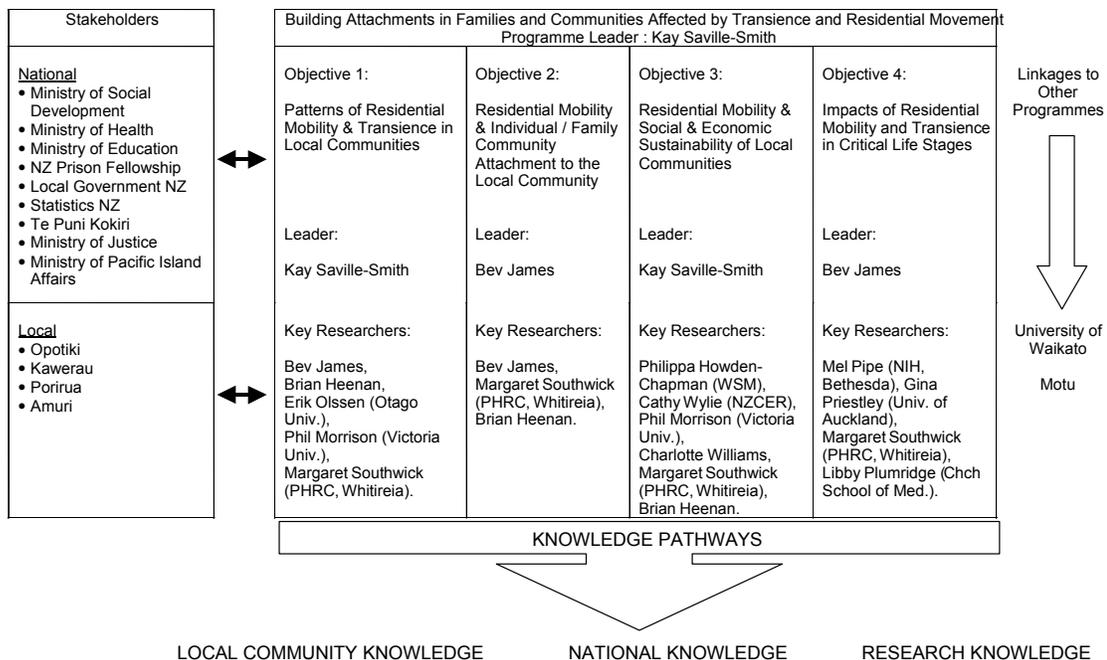- *Youth Module:* This will establish the extent to which residential mobility affects the connections and attachments of young people and the impacts on the outcome of young people's transition from childhood to adulthood. The nature of young people's subjective understandings of community and community attachment and how those are related to: sense of self and 'life project'; personal social networks; family 'traditions' and familial social networks; personal and familial socio-economic status; ethnic identifications/connections; and access to resources and services within the local community will be established.

All the modules are supported by mapping the nature, meaning and quantity of in and out migration within the context of each community's local social system. It is our view that the research programme makes a real attempt at:
- promoting cross-sectoral understanding through the application of the sectoral and life stage modules embedded within a community studies framework
- integrating the collection and analysis of both qualitative as well as quantitative data
- engaging the strengths and insights of a variety of disciplinary perspectives and applying a variety of disciplinary techniques, and
- developing multidisciplinary based research instrumentation and analytic approaches to the data.

This programme requires a significant range of skills and capabilities and encourages researchers to engage in new ways of thinking about problems and problems with a policy engagement rather than research which would read primarily to a traditional disciplinary or even sectoral field. The module arrangement of the programme allows the researchers to exercise their professional research skills, while the fundamental logic of the programme is defined through the mutual focus of the key research questions and reinforced through the case study approach. The key researchers and their arena of research are set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overview of Research Programme

Stakeholders	Building Attachments in Families and Communities Affected by Transience and Residential Movement Programme Leader : Kay Saville-Smith				
National • Ministry of Social Development • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education • NZ Prison Fellowship • Local Government NZ • Statistics NZ • Te Puni Kokiri • Ministry of Justice • Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs	Objective 1: Patterns of Residential Mobility & Transience in Local Communities	Objective 2: Residential Mobility & Individual / Family Community Attachment to the Local Community	Objective 3: Residential Mobility & Social & Economic Sustainability of Local Communities	Objective 4: Impacts of Residential Mobility and Transience in Critical Life Stages	Linkages to Other Programmes
	Leader: Kay Saville-Smith	Leader: Bev James	Leader: Kay Saville-Smith	Leader: Bev James	
Local • Opotiki • Kawerau • Porirua • Amuri	Key Researchers: Bev James, Brian Heenan, Erik Olssen (Otago Univ.), Phil Morrison (Victoria Univ.), Margaret Southwick (PHRC, Whitireia).	Key Researchers: Bev James, Margaret Southwick (PHRC, Whitireia), Brian Heenan.	Key Researchers: Philippa Howden-Chapman (WSM), Cathy Wylie (NZCER), Phil Morrison (Victoria Univ.), Charlotte Williams, Margaret Southwick (PHRC, Whitireia), Brian Heenan.	Key Researchers: Mel Pipe (NIH, Bethesda), Gina Priestley (Univ. of Auckland), Margaret Southwick (PHRC, Whitireia), Libby Plumridge (Chch School of Med.).	University of Waikato Motu

KNOWLEDGE PATHWAYS

LOCAL COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE   NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE   RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE

Research with Community and Policy Engagement

To support both community engagement and engagement with the policy sector, the programme has established a number of mechanisms. There is, of course, the straight accessing of information by the community and other stakeholders about the research. To facilitate that process, the programme has established a website and a newsletter for the researchers and the community and national reference groups. The most important mechanisms for engagement, however, are the reference groups. There are five reference groups – one for each locality and a national reference group. The membership of reference groups is fluid and in the case of the communities is self-selected. With regard to the national reference group, the membership reflects on-going interest in or synergy with the programme and includes individuals from a range of organisations (see Table 1). The functions of the reference groups are set out in Figure 2.

Table 1: National Reference Group

Name	Organisation
Robin Peace	Ministry of Social Development
Dr Ann Pomeroy	Ministry of Social Development
Kim Workman	Prison Fellowship New Zealand
Rose O'Neill	Crime Prevention Unit, Ministry of Justice
Heleen Visser	Ministry of Education
Penny Hawkins	Child, Youth and Family
Kay Charles	Te Puni Kokiri
Blair Badcock	Housing New Zealand Corporation
Mike Reid	Local Government New Zealand
Stuart Macaskill	
Margaret Southwick	Pacific Health Research Centre, Whitireia
Ria Earp	Ministry of Health
Denise Brown	Statistics New Zealand
Paul Barker	Department of Labour
Sela Gulalofa	Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs

Figure 2: Reference Group Functions
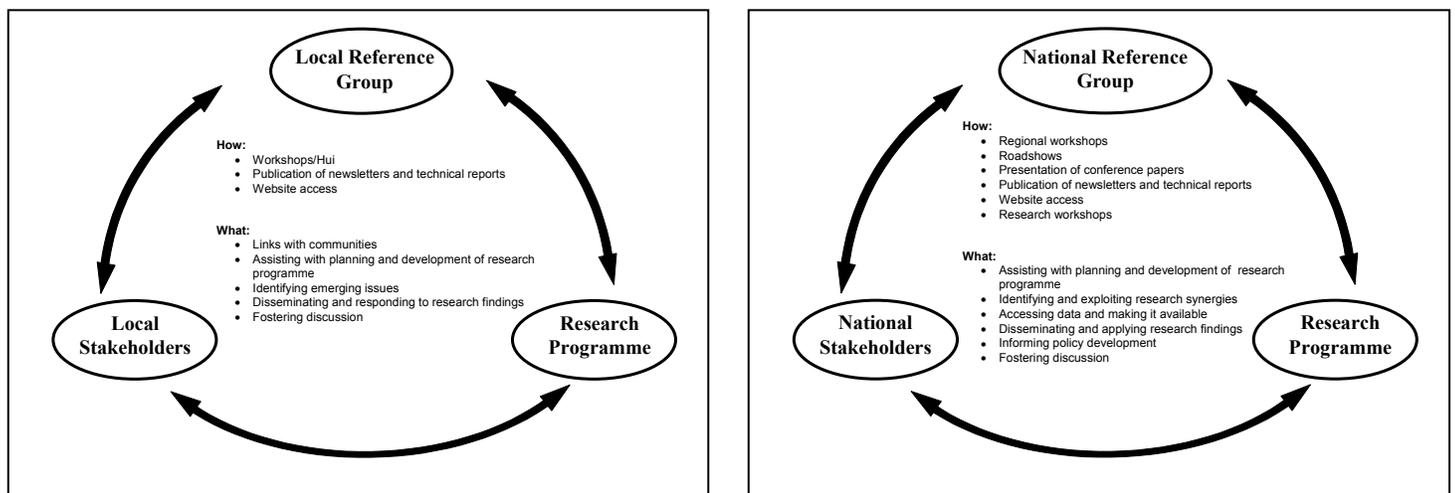
Understanding Residential Movement in the Community Context

A central part of the research programme is to clarify and categorise residential movements and the meanings communities, individuals and families bring to them. We are developing typologies of residential movement and community attachment through an approach designed to uncover the meaning of movement for communities. In the first instance this has involved the local reference groups in workshops related to movement.

In each workshop, the reference groups discussed the following questions:
- **Who** moves in and out of your community?
- What **types** of movement do you see?
- **Why** do people move?
- How is people's **attachment** to others and the wider community affected by movement?

To get discussion going, the following diagram was explained. It shows that movement can happen for both households and families, and that households and families can be separate, but related entities. The groups talked about movement of whole households, of families groups, and of individuals moving in and out of households.

Figure 3: Who Moves?
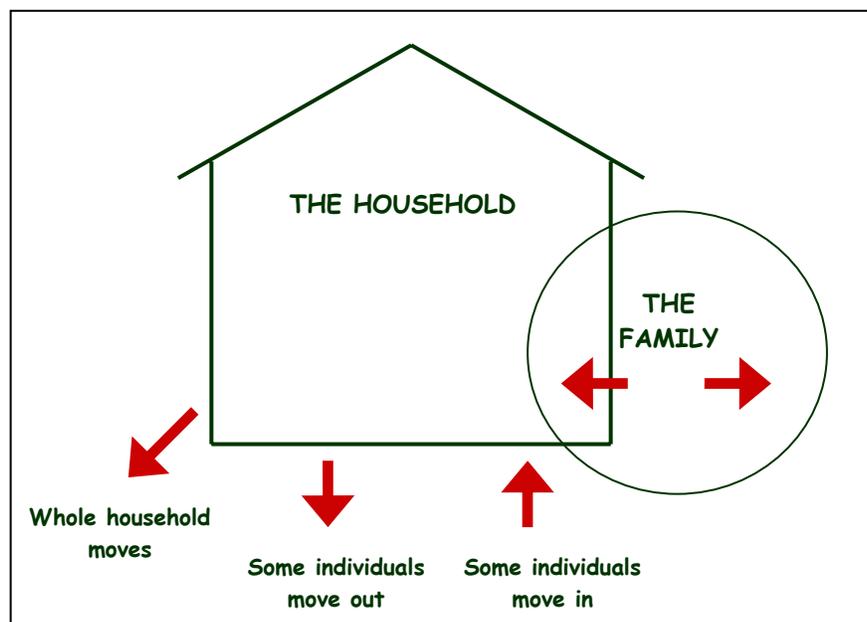
In the course of this very preliminary work with communities, the research is already generating some new understandings of not only the nature and complexity of movement, but also some of the ways in which what appear to be relatively subtle changes in practice can have profound effects on the nature of movement for communities. Some of the early findings and policy implications are outlined below. While the four communities differ in their characteristics, there were some clear similarities in the patterns of movement identified.

The reference groups identified a wide range of categories of people who move, types of movement, and key drivers of movement. There is a complex pattern of movement, with return movement of individuals and families noted in all four communities, circular movement around

particular communities, especially noted by the Pacific group in Waitangirua – Cannons Creek, and also patterns of daily/weekly/monthly movement for work and education.

In all four communities, young people experience considerable movement. A major reason for movement was around education, with movement away from the family home for secondary school education and even for primary school in one community. All community reference groups reported considerable movement out of their areas by young adults seeking work and further education after secondary school. This is an age where the four communities lose population. Young people are also moving for other reasons, notably to get out of crowded homes, and for reasons of care and protection. In three of the communities, reference group members cited numerous examples where parents made choices to move young people to live with other family members. Those three communities also saw themselves as receiving communities for troubled youth from other areas who were placed by CYF in those communities.

Older people were not considered to be a highly mobile group, although there were critical points where all communities noted their movement. One key time is shortly before or around retirement age, with movement into areas offering affordable housing and a desirable lifestyle – noted in Kawerau and Opotiki and to a lesser extent by Amuri. Another key time for the older frail, is when health and mobility become important considerations. The loss of a driver's license and the corresponding loss of mobility to access health and other services appear to be critical points in decisions about where to live.

Identity with one's community is seen as multiple and layered. Each community has clear definitions of 'long term resident' and 'local'. The reference groups easily identified community identity with land and place, and with local organisations and institutions such as schools, sports clubs, volunteer activity and churches. It was acknowledged that attachment to others can be non-place based; examples are the circulation of money and resources amongst kin that straddle several communities, getting together for important family events, and the use of information and communications technology to link the 'virtual whanau'. All communities were concerned about loss of population impacting on vital infrastructural components of the community's identity such as the provision of facilities and services and retention of key skills such as doctors, vets, pharmacists, managers, teachers and other professionals.

All four communities are relatively stable, and consequently are particularly aware of movement into, out of and around their communities. Although three of the communities were slightly less 'mobile' than the national average[2], and the fourth community around the national average, all four perceived their communities as highly mobile and as being significantly affected by movement. Families defined as 'frequent movers', although a small group, are noticeable and sometimes regarded as problematic.

Each of the communities is vitally aware of the impact of government policies on movement and communities' ability to cope with movement. It was acknowledged that one of the key drivers of movement has been restructuring in the 1980s, in combination with relocation decisions of large public and private employers that have affected employment opportunities locally. Also impacting on movement in one community has been rural housing policies affecting Maori land. Communities have also been affected by past government agency decisions regarding the housing

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[2] Nationally 23 percent of the population had been living at their current address for less than a year. The proportions in the respective communities are: Waitangirua/Cannons Creek 22.6 percent, Kawerau 18 percent, Amuri 21 percent, and Opotiki 19.3 percent.

of sole parent families, accommodation for mental health consumers and the placement of young people with extended family members.

Government actions also contribute to the way in which communities are seen as desirable or undesirable places to live. Concern was expressed about the use of the NZ Deprivation Index to define and describe communities, and the use of school decile categories.

Concluding Comments

This is a long-term research programme. The preliminary findings outlined here point to areas for further investigation. This programme provides an opportunity, through the investigation of a set of foundation questions concerning the cross-sectoral determinants and cross-sectoral implications of residential movement, to explore a wide range of issues relevant to policy and service delivery. Part of the programme's aim is to develop mechanisms that engage policy and community based people in a better understanding of how to optimise the benefits of residential mobility for individuals, families and communities.

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